



HOW TO...

Create a photo mosaic

Fancy converting your digital photographs into photo mosaics? Mike Bedford shows you how to follow in the footsteps of the ancient Romans and create a modern masterpiece

Mosaics – works of art that are created by laying a pattern of coloured ceramic or stone squares into cement – go back thousands of years. But mosaics have come on a long way since the Romans put them on the floors of their villas. Today, photo mosaics are made up from dozens of photographs, each representing a rectangular area of the image. As long as the individual photos are large enough, you can view a photo mosaic from a distance to see the overall picture or close up to see the tiny photographs that make up the whole.

Here we show you how to produce your own photo mosaics using Mosaic Creator, a shareware package that you can download from www.aolej.com and use freely for a trial period.

1 Mosaic Creator is a complicated package with many more features than we can demonstrate here. We're going to produce a simple photo mosaic on a rectangular grid, which is something that the Mosaic Creator Wizard is capable of doing. As you get to grips with the package and want to try out new things you'll probably decide to abandon the Wizard, but for now, click on Photo mosaic or photo montage on the opening page. On the next page, click Use photomosaic wizard.

2 The first step of the Mosaic Creator Wizard lets you choose the basic type of photo mosaic. The sample picture that appears as a preview illustrates the overall effect of each so you might like to click on the options to

get a feel for the other effects, but we're going to use Photomosaic, cell images are adapted to source image. Select this option and click Next.

3 Now choose the source image. This is the image that you'll be converting to a photo mosaic, as opposed to the cell images, which are the images you'll use to build up the source image. Click the Select button, choose the image you want to use and click Next. In Step 3 of the wizard, provide a filename for your completed photo mosaic. For now, you might as well stick with the default filename so just click Next.

4 Choose the cell images in the next screen. You can either pick specific images or choose whole folders, which Mosaic Creator calls directories. Later you'll probably want to fine-tune this, but the easiest way to produce your first photo mosaic is to pick a folder that contains a good selection of digital photos. Click on the Add Dir button, pick a folder and, if you want to include sub folders, make sure the Search Recursive box is checked before clicking OK. Click Next.

5 Pick shapes for the cell images in the next screen. Then, in Step 6 of the wizard, pick the size of the final mosaic. You're offered yet more final options in Step 7 of the wizard. We're mostly going to use the default settings but we'll use 20x20 cells rather than the default 40x40 to get a more detailed result. Click Next in Step 5, select sq 20x20 as the Cell Size in Pixels in Step 6 before clicking on Next, and finally click on

DID YOU KNOW?

Here we show you how to build up a mosaic using photographs as the picture elements, but you can use other bitmapped images instead of photographs. For example, if you want to produce something that looks more like a traditional mosaic you can use texture bitmaps in a variety of colours. Because these are so popular for web page backgrounds there is no shortage of texture bitmaps, and many are free. Just look for downloads and textures in your favourite search engine and you'll find stones, metals, fabrics, glasses, papers and much more.

Generate in Step 7. A window will appear showing the progress of the mosaic-generation process.

6 The processing time might be lengthy, especially if you altered the settings in Step 6 that control the size and resolution of the final image. Even our modest-sized image takes a few minutes to process, but you'll be pleased to hear that if you regenerate it after having made some slight changes, it will be much quicker on subsequent occasions.

When the photo mosaic is complete, a preview window will appear showing the results. You don't have to save it since it will already have been written to disk using the filename you supplied in Step 3 of the wizard.

Now you've seen the basic process you can try out Mosaic Creator's many other options. **CS**

